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Major push slated to boost protection at U.S. embassies

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The State Department announced yesterday a \$3.5 billion plan to renovate or rebuild almost half of its overseas embassies and consular offices in response to the growing terrorist threat.

The massive construction project was one of 91 recommendations — some classified and not made public — sent to Secretary of State George P. Shultz by a blue-ribbon panel created last July to study security and anti-terrorist procedures at the 262 embassies and consular offices the United States operates worldwide.

The report said that 126 did not meet minimum security standards and that 75 would have to be abandoned or rebuilt at new, more secure locations.

The panel, headed by former CIA deputy director Bobby R. Inman, also recommended a sweeping reorganization of the State Department's security and counter-terrorism offices into a new Bureau for Diplomatic Security.

It concluded that "organizational ineffectiveness" of the department's security programs resulted from "dispersion of responsibility, a dramatically increased work load, gross understaffing with a consequent inability to train properly, and a general loss of control over resources and priorities."

Assistant Secretary for Administration Robert E. Lamb, who will coordinate the implementation of the panel's recommendations, said yesterday Mr. Shultz "agreed in principle" with the committee's recommendations and believes they are "imaginative, well-thought out and far-reaching."

He said the department intended to move swiftly on the recommendations and would probably go to Capitol Hill after the July 4th congressional recess to ask for the necessary funds and legislative authority.

In all, the report said, 344 U.S. offices overseas might be involved in the massive renovation and rebuilding project, which Mr. Lamb said would take seven or eight years to complete.

He said the 75 embassies and offices will have to be relocated because they are located in downtown areas and are vulnerable to terrorist attacks by car and truck bombers such as occurred at the Marine barracks and U.S. Embassy annex in Beirut in October 1983.

Neither Mr. Lamb nor the report identified which embassies did not meet minimum security standards.

"As shown by the bombings and

takeovers at our embassy buildings in the Middle East in recent years, as well as by the levels of electronic and other eavesdropping activities by our adversaries, there are simply too many risks to our diplomatic personnel and activities at posts with these vulnerabilities to allow these buildings to remain potential targets for such threats," the report said.

"The peaceful neighborhood, city, or country of yesterday can be a hotbed of terrorism, insurgency or violence tomorrow. Buildings that were designed, located and constructed most carefully in the past may now be unacceptable from a security standpoint.

"In many cases, embassies and other buildings are located along busy public roads and streets that cannot be closed or changed. In other cases, embassies are tenants in buildings they occupy exclusively or, in some cases, share with others."

Mr. Lamb said the panel did not consider whether American embassies, particularly in Soviet Union and Eastern bloc countries, should employ foreign nationals to work in low-level jobs in the embassies.

But he noted that several weeks ago officials began replacing Soviet citizens working in the U.S. Embassy in Moscow with Americans.

About half of the 400 workers in the embassy there are Soviets.

The debate over employing foreign nationals heated up this year after electronic bugging devices were found in typewriters at the Moscow embassy. The State Department has said that the foreign workers do not have access to sensitive information but has begun replacing them with Americans in Soviet bloc countries as a precaution.

The internal reorganization recommended would consolidate State Department security function in a new Bureau for Diplomatic Security.

"A principal element of the new bureau should be the Diplomatic Security Service, a consolidation of the present Office of Security, the Diplomatic Courier Service and other security functions currently performed elsewhere in the Department," the report said.

It said security functions in other agencies, such as the U.S. Information Agency and Agency for International Development be shifted to the new security office.

The panel also recommended improvements in training foreign service personnel, better contingency planning at the embassy level, the revision of physical security standards to "state of the art" concepts and creation of a board of inquiry to investigate security incidents and terrorist acts.